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Custard Caravan Will Bring Back Childhood Memories

ST. LOUIS - Remember when the ice cream man prowled suburban neighborhoods in his van and kids longed for the sound of the bell as he rounded the corner onto their street?

Bobbi Martinez has taken that concept to a new level with her new business, Custard Caravan. Her mobile frozen custard parlor, which opened in April 2002, employs eight workers who keep busy taking the specially designed and outfitted vehicle to festivals, fairs, neighborhood parties and parades.

Her novel concept has been so successful that she's currently considering expanding the business to five mobile units. That's a lot of shakes, concretes, sundaes and cones. But Bobbi is up to the task, says Aldis Jakubovskis, her Small Business Development Center counselor with the St. Louis Regional SBDC.

"Bobbi definitely has what it takes to be successful," Aldis says. "Even though she missed her start-up date slightly due to circumstances beyond her control, she persevered, and the business is right on track with projections."

Bobbi found the SBDC when she visited the U.S. Small Business Administration in St. Louis to seek information on business planning. Her initial idea to establish a permanent location for her frozen custard business didn't cash flow to her satisfaction. That's when she decided to put the business on wheels and she has never looked back. Some personal equity investment and a modest bank loan put her on the road! And now her family-owned firm will provide her and her husband a terrific retirement income.

As her business grows, Bobbi plans to consult with Aldis for additional guidance on expansion. She also plans to attend the St. Louis SBDC's strategic business planning class for entrepreneurs.

"We could not have done this without Aldis," Bobbi states. "We were able to write a successful business plan and realize what changes we needed to make to have a successful business. This program helps future small business owners such as us make educated and informed decisions, thereby lowering the risk of business failure."

Look for Bobbi and the Custard Caravan on the road in eastern Missouri.

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